

BAPTIST MINISTRY SEMINAR – SESSION 7

The Bible and Beverage Alcohol, Part I

(Prov. 20:1)

- I. Beverage Alcohol and the Old Testament
 - A. The word “wine” appears over 200 times in the King James Version of the Old Testament, and it is used as an English translation for several different Hebrew terms.
 - B. God commanded that His priests abstain from the use of beverage alcohol (Lev. 10:8-11), noting that they were to be a holy example to all Israel.
 - C. Samson’s mother was commanded to abstain from beverage alcohol because Samson was to be dedicated to God in a unique way (Judges 13:3, 4). Apparently beverage alcohol and dedication to God are incompatible.
 - D. Israel’s rulers were specifically forbidden from using beverage alcohol (Prov. 31:4, 5).
 - E. Solomon emphasized the importance of avoiding wine that had been fermented: “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright” (Prov. 23:31).
 - F. The Old Testament repeatedly warns about the evils of beverage alcohol:
 1. *“For the drunkard...shall come to poverty” (Prov. 23:21).*
 2. *“Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine” (Prov. 23:29, 30).*
 3. *“At the last it [beverage alcohol] biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder” (Prov. 23:32).*
 4. *“Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people” (Hab. 2:5).*

- G. Several Old Testament references, however, speak of wine as a blessing: Gen. 27:28; Judges 9:13; Ps. 104:14, 15. **How can wine be spoken of as both a blessing and a curse?**

II. The Hebrew Terms for Wine and Their Uses

- A. The Hebrew words translated “wine” in the Bible do not always mean fermented or intoxicating wine.
- B. The Hebrew word *yayin*, most often translated “wine” in the Old Testament, means grape juice in any form—fermented or unfermented. The true meaning can only be determined by the context. *Yayin* is a general term referring to any beverage—sweet or sour, fermented or fresh—derived from grapes.
- C. The Hebrew word *tirosh*, also translated “wine,” in all but one possible case means “new wine,” “unfermented wine.” This word was used repeatedly in the original text in the places where wine has a good textual connotation. Example: *Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth and plenty of corn and wine [tirosh—unfermented grape juice](Gen. 27:28)*. Note the association of fresh corn at harvest with fresh, unfermented grape juice at harvest.
- D. Many wines of the ancients were boiled or filtered to prevent fermentation, and these were often considered the best wines.
- E. Having carefully examined the context of the uses of *yayin* in the Old Testament, Dr. Robert P. Teachout has concluded that this word is intended to mean grape juice 71 times and fermented wine 70 times.
- F. How can the English reader determine whether the Old Testament is speaking of unfermented, good wine, or fermented, bad wine? Simply examine the context of the verse. Wherever the use of wine is prohibited or discouraged, the reference is to fermented wine. Where its use is encouraged, the reference is to unfermented grape juice.
- G. Any argument for the use of beverage alcohol must blur the distinction in Old Testament usage of the word “wine.” In addition, such arguments must “explain away” the Bible’s clear condemnation of intoxicating beverages.